

THE MEADOWS/LEACOTE
RIVER ROAD
RHINEBECK VICINITY
DUTCHESS COUNTY
NEW YORK

HABS No. NY-5622

HABS
NY,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5622

THE MEADOWS/LEACOTE

Location: River Road, Rhinebeck vicinity, Dutchess County, New York.

Present Owner: Udo Van Meeteren.

Present Use: Farm.

Significance: The Meadows was established in 1847 by Charles Shiels Wainwright and his brother, William Pratt Wainwright. The estate, comprising a large English Gothic house erected in 1847, a dairy cottage built in 1849, a 350 acre farm, was purchased in 1875 by Douglas Merritt, the former owner of Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, New York. Merritt changed the name to Leacote. Over twenty-six outbuildings were erected in the English Gothic style between 1847 and 1926. The main house was destroyed by fire in 1977. Leacote, still an operating farm, is one of twenty-one contiguous estates along the east bank of the Hudson River between Staatsburg and Tivoli, New York.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: William Pratt Wainwright and Charles Shiels Wainwright purchased part of Rutsen Suckley's farmland in late 1847. The main house was constructed in 1848; the dairy cottage was completed in 1849.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1847 Deed recorded October 12, 1847 in Book 85 page 421
Rutsen Suckley
to
William Pratt Wainwright and Charles Sheils Wainwright for
\$23,000

1875 Deed recorded May 15, 1875 in Book 179 page 521
William Wainwright
to
Charles S. Wainwright for \$2 (quitclaim to Leacote)

1875 Deed recorded January 30, 1875 in Book 178 page 334
Charles S. Wainwright
to
Douglas Merritt for \$53,000

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- 1927 Records of Surrogate's Court, Dutchess County File No. 30049
Douglas Merritt
to
Elizabeth Cleveland Merritt (fair market value \$100,000)
- 1931 Records of Surrogate's Court, Dutchess County File No. 32842
Elizabeth Cleveland Merritt
to
Ethel Douglas Merritt and Alan Douglas Merritt (fair market value \$90,000)
- 1942 Deed recorded June 17, 1972 in Book 601 page 263
Ethel Douglas Merritt
to
Alan Douglas Merritt for \$35,000
- 1944 Deed recorded September 15, 1948 in Book 700 page 107
Alan Douglas Merritt and Grace E. Merritt, his wife
to
The same, as tenants by the entirety for \$56,363.63 with \$62 in IRS stamps
- 1971 Deed recorded December 30, 1971 in Book 1323 page 297
Irving Trust Company, New York City, executor of estate of Grace E. Merritt, and Charles E. Mason
to
Leacote Farm, Ltd. for \$275,000
- 1971 Foreclosure recorded December 30, 1971 Mortgages 1059 page 921
Leacote Farm, Ltd.
to
Council Commerce Corp.
- 1973 Deed recorded September 17, 1973 in Book 1368 page 301
Harold Mangold, referee in action between Council Commerce Corp. and Leacote Farm, Ltd., G.B.S. Management Corp. and the People of the State of New York
to
G.B.S. Management Corp. for \$320,000
- 1973 Deed recorded September 27, 1973 in Book 1368 page 992
G.B.S. Management Corp.
to
Seymour Svirsky
4. Original plan and construction: Leacote, composed in the English rural Gothic style, features diamond pane windows, projecting bays, carved labels, a roof with multiple steep gables, and porte cochère. The distinctly English details are low rising Tudor arches at the front door and porte cochère, random ashlar stonework, large triple casement windows and clustered chimneys and suggesting an Elizabethan origin.

The earliest known view is an 1881 woodcut in Smith's History of Dutchess County, published thirty years after Leacote was constructed. Except for the one-story rear wing, the original house was much the same as shown. The main floor contained a drawing room, dining room, study, schoolroom, pantry and kitchen. The kitchen, the only room without returns on the window labels, may have been added later.

5. Additions and alterations: Apparently the kitchen wing was constructed with the main house in 1848. The rear service wings were added later. A 27" thick partition wall between the kitchen and rear wing suggests that it was once the exterior wall. A whitestone watertable stops at the end of the kitchen wing and continues in bluestone until it stops at the very back of the house.

A one story servants' hall was added between 1882 as it appears in the 1882 woodcut. The one-story laundry wing probably was added in 1893 as that date appears on the lintel above the laundry door. In 1899, the date inscribed over the servants' hall entry, a second floor was added to the servants' hall. The stonework on the servants wing, more rusticated than that of the main house, looks like it was executed by John W. Tatar. Tatar, a mason, was responsible for stonework at Leacote from 1893 until 1926.

Interior renovations evidently took place in 1905, the date inscribed at the rear entry to the main hall. Light oak wainscoting and flatter mouldings modified the upper hall.

The grand veranda on the south elevation was the last exterior addition to Leacote.

B. Historical Context:

Charles Sheils Wainwright and William Pratt Wainwright bought the Meadows in 1847. The brothers were well-educated and shared a passion for the military, politics and farming. Their close friends included General John Watts de Peyster of Rose Hill; William Kelly of Ellerslie, a candidate for Governor of New York; James W. Beekman, a New York Assemblyman and Senator; and Marsena R. Patrick, President of the New York Agricultural College and military planner on the staff of Governor Morgan.

In 1854, William Wainwright married Cornelia Tillotson, a descendant of the influential Livingston family through Margaret Livingston and John Tillotson, Surgeon General to General Washington's army. The Hudson River climate did not agree with Mrs. Wainwright's health and in 1855, William sold his interest in the Meadows to his brother. In a letter to James Beekman, he wrote, "I am undecided what to do but think something of passing the summer in Sullivan County. If the country be pleasant and the farming promises to be more lucrative than on the river, we may

take up permanent abode there." A year later Wainwright stated, "My wife, she was much better in Sullivan, but there is no society there and her friends are all here ..." The Wainwrights traveled for Cornelia's health, but spent much time at the Meadows.

When the Civil War broke out, both militia-trained brothers were eager to join the Union Army. William enlisted immediately with the rank of Major in the New York Infantry. Charles hesitated to leave his elderly father and younger sister with the responsibilities of the farm, but after the August harvest enlisted in the artillery. Both Wainwrights earned the rank of Colonel under the command of Gen. John de Peyster; Charles' military career has been documented in his articulate journal, A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles Shiels Wainwright 1861-1865. In a rare reference to the Meadows, he mentioned that the farm was run during his absence by a manager named Lewis. He spoke of good profits, but complained that the road and grounds deteriorated after the gardener was drafted.

After the war, Charles returned to Leacote. He never married. His biographer reported that he was incapacitated by blindness and malaria.

Douglas Merritt, the eldest son of George Merritt of Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, purchased the Meadows two years after his father's death in 1875. In a December 26, 1874, letter to A.J. Davis, longtime family friend and architect of Lyndhurst, he wrote, "If I get a farm at all I should prefer one with a house already built." He changed the Meadows' name to Leacote, an anglicized name more suited to his taste.

In 1876, Merritt married Elizabeth Cleveland Coxe, daughter of the bishop of Western New York State. They had two children, Ethel and Alan. Merritt, a lawyer who practiced in Rhinebeck, also operated Leacote as a working farm: twenty-six farm structures were built during his lifetime.

The house was furnished in a popular contemporary style. The Eastlake dining room furniture was published in Eastlake Influenced American Furniture 1870-1890. An inventory of Leacote's contents accompanies Merritt's will. His library contained many theological titles. He also owned Pugin's treatises on the Gothic.

After Merritt's death in 1927 and his wife's shortly thereafter, the Merritt children inherited Leacote where they continued to live. In 1942, Ethel sold her share to Alan. He changed his father's third floor library into a gymnasium. Leacote farm was operated until it became unprofitable c. 1955. After Alan Merritt's death, his wife Grace lived in the schoolhouse on the property until her death in 1971.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Dutchess County Courthouse, Poughkeepsie,
New York.

Records of the Surrogate's Court, Dutchess County Courthouse
Poughkeepsie, New York.

A.J. Davis Collection II, Avery Library, Columbia University,
New York, New York.

Beekman Collection, William P. Wainwright to James W. Beekman
Correspondence, Manuscript Department, New York Historical
Society, New York, New York.

Douglas Merritt Records, 1910, 1913, 1916, Rhinebeck, New York.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Commemorative Biographical Record of Dutchess County.
New York: 1897.

Eastlake Influenced American Furniture 1870-1890. New York:
The Hudson River Museum, 1973.

Morse, Howard M. Historic Old Rhinebeck. Rhinebeck: 1908.

The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography. New York:
James T. White and Company, 1932.

Nevins, Allen. A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of
Charles Shiels Wainwright 1861-1865. New York: 1962.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Rhinebeck vicinity project including all of The Meadows/Leacote (NY-5622) and the Stable and Carriage House and Stable Cottage as well (HABS No. NY-5622-A and NY-5622-B) was sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the Dutchess County Landmarks Association, with a grant from the New York Council on the Arts and further assistance from the IBM Mid-Hudson Valley, The Richard Hampton Jenrette Foundation, the Rhinebeck Historical Society and Private Donors; measured and drawn during the summer of 1974 under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), by Richard Crowley (Architect, Rhinebeck), Project Supervisor, with Susanne Brendel (Columbia University), Historian, and Randy Abramson (Washington University), Robert Ferland (Cornell University), Thomas Fisher (Cornell University), and Stanley Tany (University of Pennsylvania), Student Assistant Architects, at Rhinebeck, New York. The historical and descriptive data was edited for HABS in 1981 by Susan Stein, Architectural Historian. Final preparation of the documentation was carried out in the HABS Washington office by Paul Dolinsky, HABS Architect, and Lucy Pope Wheeler, HABS Writer/Editor.